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# 103-Year-Old Philanthropist Leaves \$3.8 Million Windfall to the University of Dayton for Scholarships

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Feb. 3, 2005  
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## NEWS RELEASE

### 103-YEAR-OLD PHILANTHROPIST LEAVES \$3.8 MILLION WINDFALL TO THE UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON FOR SCHOLARSHIPS

DAYTON, Ohio — Lydia Mychkovsky received a scholarship this year that has given her the financial freedom to apply for an unpaid summer internship that will help jump-start her career.

When Eileen Sears quietly died in her sleep on Sept. 12, 2004, at the age of 103, she ensured that Mychkovsky and countless other University of Dayton students will continue to receive financial assistance for generations to come. She left a windfall of more than \$3.8 million to UD to boost the H. Troy and Eileen L. Sears Scholarship Fund to \$4.7 million.

In all, the couple donated more than \$6 million to UD. In 1992, they gave \$1.3 million to construct the 183-seat H. Troy and Eileen L. Sears Recital Hall in the Jesse Philips Humanities Center on campus. Until Mr. Sears died in 1999 at the age of 91, the couple often came to campus to enjoy performances.

"This is a wonderful, wonderful boost for scholarships," said Nancy Stork, director of gift planning.

It's also one of the largest bequests in UD's history, second only to Dayton philanthropist John Berry's \$5 million for scholarships through the Berry Honors and Scholars Program.

"Without the extra funds, acceptance of a nonpaid position would be out of the question, and I would surely miss out on a career-enhancing experience," said Mychkovsky, an exercise science major from Westerville, Ohio, who's applying for internships in epidemiology. "I am very grateful for the monetary gift and all of the doors of opportunity it has helped to open."

The couple's ties to UD ran deep. Mrs. Sears served as director of the student union in the 1950s and taught music and education for 40 years in the Dayton Public Schools as well as

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at UD. Mr. Sears, a 1940 UD graduate, taught business management at his alma mater before devoting his working life to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he retired as chief of contract terminations. Both received their master's degrees from The Ohio State University — she in music and he in education.

"They both taught at UD, but they had no children," said attorney Peter Finke, a friend and executor of the estate. "They reveled in being with the younger people at the University and having the opportunity to teach them. They were a substitute for the children they never had."

The couple was beloved on campus. When Mrs. Sears reached the century mark, faculty and staff serenaded her at a birthday party. They threw another party for her 103rd birthday on Aug. 27. There, UD music professor Linda Snyder sang "I Could Have Danced All Night" to a woman who, even in her 90s, could dance the night away.

"She was one remarkable lady," Snyder said. "She was just a ball of energy and an inspiration to our students and faculty."

At a Sept. 28 campus "celebration of thanksgiving" memorial service for the couple, past UD President Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M., told stories about their hospitality — and love of life and for each other.

"As a newly minted president in 1981, I remember visiting them in Florida. At 5 p.m. they blew party horns as a signal to everyone in their condominium that it was time to have a drink. They had a wonderfully warm and welcoming spirit," he said. "Eileen was the free spirit of the marriage. She loved to sing and dance and just bring joy to people's hearts."

During their tenure at UD, the couple chaperoned student dances, including the time Lawrence Welk performed. As a physical education instructor, Mrs. Sears taught football players how to folk dance. Every December, she would stage a Christmas pageant on campus with the help of Maurice Reichard, then chair of the music department. Later in life, even into her 90s, Mrs. Sears accompanied Friday night sing-alongs at the Dayton Country Club. She always tuned in the Dayton Flyers' basketball games on the radio.

The couple cherished their connection to the University of Dayton.

Said Finke: "Once I introduced Eileen to someone, who asked, 'Sears as in Sears Roebuck?' She quickly responded, 'No, sir. Sears as in the H. Troy and Eileen Sears Recital Hall in the Jesse Philips Humanities Center at the University of Dayton.' They loved UD."

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For assistance in scheduling interviews, contact **Teri Rizvi** at (937) 229-3241 or [rizvi@udayton.edu](mailto:rizvi@udayton.edu).